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WHA/BSC FOR MARY DASCHBACH

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ECON UY

SUBJECT: URUGUAY: LUNCH WITH COLORADO PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE PEDRO BORDABERRY

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alfred Schandlbauer
for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

Summary

¶1. (SBU) On July 20, Charge met with Colorado Presidential candidate Pedro Bordaberry and four of his closest aides. Bordaberry, who currently polls around 10-12 percent, was realistic about his chances for victory this year, but believes he is setting the foundation for a victory as early as 2014. He plans to play a kingmaker role during this election, noting that his bloc of voters will choose the winner in the likely event of a run-off election between the Blanco Party and ruling Frente Amplio (FA) coalition candidates. Borbaberry seems to have put aside the 170-year rivalry between Blancos (the National Party) and Colorados, and was extremely critical of the FA. End summary.

New Beginnings for the Colorados

¶2. (SBU) The Colorados, who have led the country with only a few interruptions since Uruguay's independence, are currently at their lowest level of popularity in history, with support from only around 10 percent of the population. While the party's support had been slipping for decades, its precipitous decline was brought on by what most Uruguayans feel was mismanagement during a severe economic crisis in 2002, and exacerbated by ancient leadership that many Uruguayans believe has been stuck in the past. While some analysts believe that the party is on an irreversible downward trajectory, Bordaberry sees his overwhelming victory -- over three-quarters of Colorado voters chose him as the party's presidential candidate -- over others backed by the party's giants (two ex-presidents) in recent primary elections as cause for optimism. He believes that at this point the Colorado Party has an advantage because it is now the only mainstream Uruguayan party not weighed down by dinosaurs. With that in mind, Bordaberry is beginning his 2014 campaign now.

¶3. (SBU) Bordaberry's key goal is to rebuild the party by engaging young voters and to retrieve the socialist-minded Battista voters that were lost to the FA last round. His primary tool is the Colorado Foundation, a think tank designed to reach out to voters across the spectrum, especially in the interior and among youth. He takes pride in doing things differently from the other parties, for example, in his (unprecedented in Uruguay) choice of a former soccer star and head coach, Hugo de Leon, for his vice presidential candidate.

Colorados: The Tiebreakers

¶4. (C) Bordaberry is playing to win, but ultimately will join

forces with Lacalle to beat Mujica in the case of a run-off. He projects that his 10 percent support could grow to between 16 and 18 percent by October, making him an even more important factor in the final outcome. Also, in addition to running for President, Bordaberry is running for senator and Colorado Party president, both of which will solidify his political future.

¶15. (C) The age-old rivalry between Uruguay's traditional two parties, the Blancos and Colorados, has generally been cooperative and occasionally friendly over recent years and since the emergence of the Frente Amplio (FA) coalition of leftist parties in the 1970s, the traditional parties have generally stuck together in the face of what they perceive to be a common adversary. In the event of a runoff, the Colorados would endorse Blanco candidate Luis Alberto Lacalle (septel) in a way Bordaberry described as non-traditional. That is, Bordaberry said that instead of asking for key political appointments in exchange for Colorado support at the polls, Bordaberry would demand influence over key policy decisions. Bordaberry did not explain how this policy influence would materialize without Colorados in the government to promote it, however.

Democratic Values at Risk?

¶16. (C) Bordaberry had a mixed assessment of the Vazquez government, giving credit for the expansion of Montevideo's port and its implementation of Plan Ceibal, the one-laptop-per-child program. Bordaberry expressed concern with what he considers to be the extremist ideology of FA candidate Jose Mujica and his supporting team. Bordaberry

lamented that what he described as their Cold War rhetoric and policies are completely out of date and inappropriate to present circumstances. He also feared that Mujica's inexperience could result in a tendency to value the attainment of a particular end over democratic institutions. He said he felt that in general a Mujica-led government would be more likely to take shortcuts to implement policies -- shortcuts that would circumvent or otherwise harm or marginalize Uruguay's constitution and other power-checking institutions. Bordaberry's criticisms of current government policies included the GOU stance on public security (he noted that the current government doesn't believe in authority, hence finds it difficult to enforce the law), education (not one of those present sends his children to public school), and that the FA's social policies that provide hand-outs rather than work opportunities.

Bordaberry: Up Close and Personal

¶17. (SBU) Bordaberry, once a prominent rugby player, is an engaging speaker with a mild and friendly manner. He is simultaneously quick and pensive, and his English is excellent. He has the full respect of his aides, and does most of the talking with them supporting him as needed. The rapport among the team was excellent.

¶18. (SBU) Bordaberry is considering a trip to the U.S. in September. He is hoping for September 22-23 but is flexible. He has asked for meetings at the assistant secretary level.

Schandlbauer